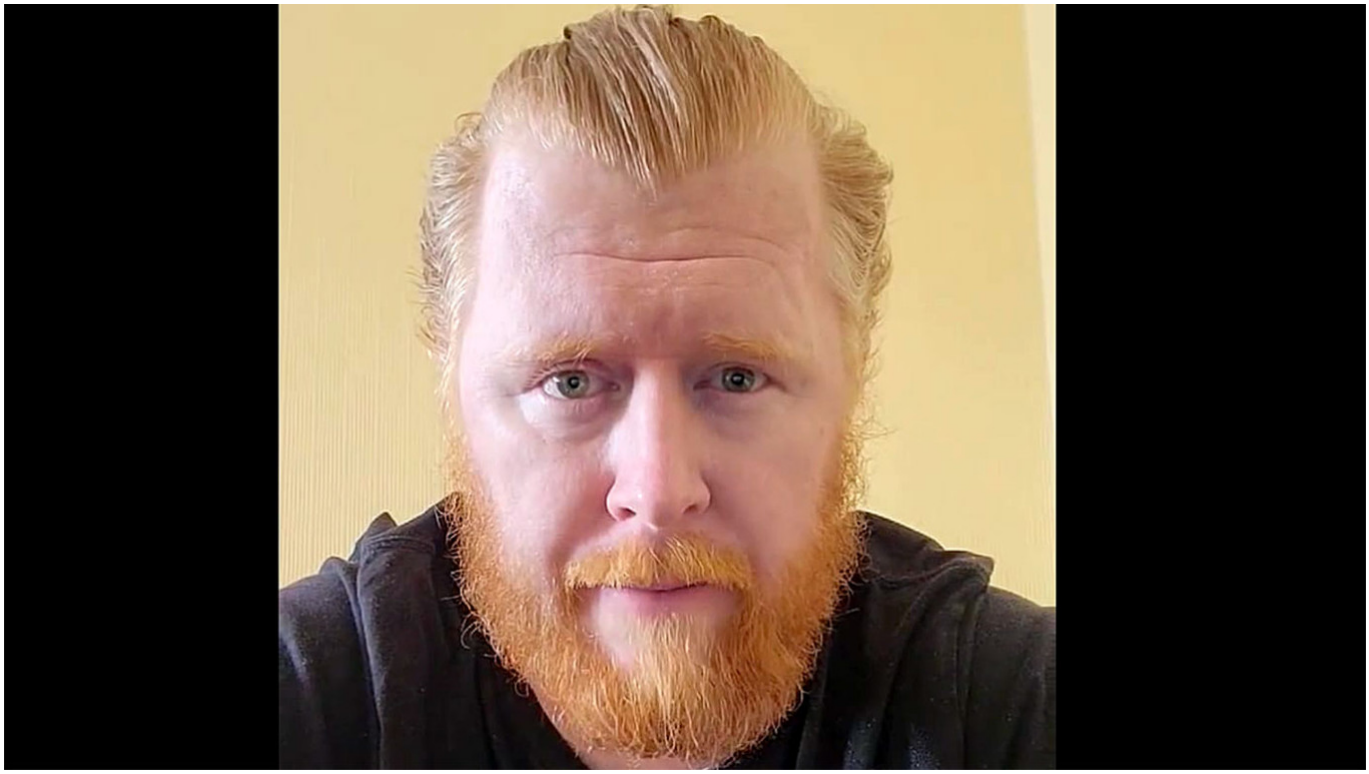
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U.S. Volunteer Fighter Killed in Ukraine, Reports Say

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Nick Maimer **via Facebook**

A retired U.S. Army Special Forces soldier was killed during the fight for the war-torn eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, American media reported Tuesday after the head of Russia's Wagner mercenary group showed footage of his body.

Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin displayed the body of what he said was an American laying in the rubble of a building amid competing claims of Russian and Ukrainian advances in Bakhmut.

The deceased was retired Army Staff Sergeant Nick Maimer, 45, the Idaho Statesman newspaper reported, citing one of his relatives and a fellow soldier who had helped recruit him in May 2022.

He is at least the ninth American to have been killed in Ukraine since Russia invaded in February 2022.

Maimer was killed inside a building that was destroyed in Russian artillery fire, Perry Blackburn, a retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel, told the publication. Blackburn said Maimer provided "firsthand training" to the Ukrainian forces and "got caught behind enemy lines."

"He went over there as a humanitarian trying to do good for this world," said Maimer's uncle Paul Maimer.

The 20-year military veteran from Boise, Idaho, retired in 2018 and moved to Spain to teach English two months before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. He had told the Statesman in June 2022 that he felt compelled to help fight Russia's "unjustified invasion."

"I'm used to an acceptable amount of risk," Maimer said in a phone interview at the time.

Blackburn, who founded the nonprofit AFGFree to provide Ukraine with supplies and evacuate civilians, told CNN that Ukrainians who were with Maimer believed he was either trapped in the collapsed building or killed by a "barrage" of Russian artillery fire.

"Nick [Maimer] was not over there as a mercenary," Blackburn told CNN. "We talked about how there's no need for us to pick up a gun, our need is to help keep people alive. And he was all in for that."

The U.S. State Department could not confirm Maimer's death, saying its ability to verify reports of deaths of U.S. citizens is "extremely limited."

In Wagner's video, Prigozhin is shown standing beside the body, which appears to have suffered a stomach wound, and displaying to the camera what appears to be the soldier's identity documents, without giving a full name.

"We will return him to the United States. We will put him in a coffin [with] the American flag. With respect, because he didn't die in a grandfather's bed but in the war," the Wagner boss said.

AFP contributed reporting.

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